

What is claimed is:

1. A method for tracking and recording the processing of food products from the farm to the ultimate consumer, said method comprising the steps of:

providing a label maker with a number generator for printing a scannable unique code or number upon a label, for producing uniquely encoded labels as required;

applying permanent labels onto a plurality of food gathering baskets located on the premises of the food gathering organization, each label being coded for uniquely identifying each basket and the associated manufacturer, each label being provided through use of said label maker; and

scanning the respective labels on said baskets when distributed to crop pickers, for recording on said ledger the name of the crop picker assigned a particular basket, along with other information printed on the label, and date and time marking.

2. The method of Claim 1, further including the step of scanning the labels on each full crop gathering basket returned by a crop picker to a receiving station of the associated gathering organization, for date and time marking the receipt, and updating the ledger to show each such receipt, the crop picker's identification, and noting the product, farm source, and any other required data, along with removing the crop picker's name from assignment of the basket.

3. The method of Claim 2, further including the steps of:
labeling processing tanks with a permanent unique identification number or code; and
scanning the labels on each full gathering basket at the time of dumping its food product into a receiving processing tank or container, for date and time marking the dumping, noting the destination of the tank or container, and updating the ledger.

4. The method of Claim 3, further including the steps of:

applying to every relatively large container a permanent label imprinted with a scannable unique code or number, said label to be applied at the time of manufacture, for uniquely identifying each container throughout their entire period of use;

scanning a label after application to a container, for date and time marking the manufacture of the container, and identifying the manufacturer; and

registering data obtained in said scanning step into a central ledger for recording placement of the container into the inventory of the associated manufacturer, and maintaining a permanent record of the history of the container, including its manufacturer and use.

5. The method of Claim 4, further including the step of scanning the labels for date and time marking all labeled containers at each station or point in the process for converting raw food product into a final packaged product, and for updating the ledger with the scanned data.

6. The method of Claim 4, further including the step of scanning labels of empty drums or containers delivered by intermediate processors to a production line, to provide date and time marking of each drum along with the associated production line number and product identification of product to be loaded into an associated drum, the scanned and included data being used to reduce the intermediate packer's inventory of packaging materials, and update the central ledger.

7. The method of Claim 6, further including the steps of:

moving processing tanks filled with product to be processed to a production line, for emptying product onto the production line; and

scanning labels of emptied processing tanks for time and date marking associated product dumping events, for obtaining data to identify product delivered to the production

line, reduce the intermediate packer's inventory of filled processing tanks, marking the products association with a particular production line, and updating said ledger.

8. The method of Claim 7, further including the steps of:

applying to every unlabeled container, if any, containing ingredients to be added to product during processing; and

scanning labels of containers carrying ingredients to date and time mark each, and to indicate the amount of said respective ingredients that are to be added to product, respectively.

9. The method of Claim 7, further including the steps of:

scanning the labels on empty large containers to be shipped to distributors as they are loaded onto transport vehicles for date and time marking each container for updating said ledger to reduce the associated manufacturer's inventory, and to produce a packing list for the associated shipment; and

scanning the labels on empty said large containers at the time of delivery to a distributor for date and time marking them, adding them into the distributor's inventory, and updating said ledger.

10. The method of Claim 9, further including the steps of:

scanning the labels on empty said large containers at the time of loading onto a transport vehicle for shipment from the distributor to an end user packer, for date and time marking to both produce a packing list, and reduce the distributor's inventory, along with updating said ledger; and

scanning the labels on empty large containers upon delivery to an end user packer, for both registering the containers into the packer's unfinished inventory, and updating said ledger.

11. The method of Claim 10, further including the steps of:
scanning labels of filled containers or drums after filling to identify their source product, introduce the same into the intermediate packer's inventory, and update said ledger, for the semi-processed product; and

scanning labels of containers of semi-processed product as they are loaded onto transport vehicles for creating a packing list, reducing the intermediate packer's inventory of semi-processed product, and updating said ledger.

12. The method of Claim 11, further including the step of scanning the labels of the semi-processed product drums or containers when delivered to a final packer's facility, for date and time marking, and adding the same to the final packer's inventory, and updating said ledger.

13. The method of Claim 12, further including the step of scanning the labels of any semi-processed product drums or containers randomly selected for inspection or sampling, for date and time marking, and adding to said ledger.

14. The method of Claim 12, further including the step of scanning the labels of drums or containers of semi-processed product for date and time marking when they are delivered to a final packer, for updating said ledger along with a notation of the pack line number, and for removing the associated drums or containers from semi-processed inventory.

15. The method of Claim 13, further including the step of scanning the labels of drums or containers of semi-processed product for date and time marking when they are delivered to a final packer, for updating said ledger along with a notation of the pack line number, and for removing the associated drums or containers from semi-processed inventory.

16. The method of Claim 14, further including the steps of:
applying to any pallet loaded with a plurality of relatively small containers, a permanent label imprinted with a scannable unique code or number, said label to be applied at the time of loading each said pallet(s), for uniquely identifying each said pallet(s) as used in association with said plurality of relatively small containers;
scanning the label on each said pallet(s), for date and time marking the loading of the pallet, identifying the relatively small containers, and their manufacturer; and
registering data obtained in said step of scanning each pallet label into said ledger, for date and time marking the loading of a pallet, identifying the containers, and their manufacturer, and for recording placement of the pallet(s) with associated containers into the inventory of the associated manufacturer.

17. The method of Claim 16, further including the step of scanning the labels of pallets carrying relatively small containers for date and time marking the pallet label when brought to the pack line, and using the scanned data to reduce an inventory of packaging materials.

18. The method of Claim 17, further including the step of removing any shrink wrap and labels from said pallets.

19. The method of Claim 18, further including the step of printing coded information on said small containers at the time of filling them with product and sealing the containers.

20. The method of Claim 19, further including the steps of:
casing and palletizing the small containers as they exit an associated packing line;
applying a new label with unique identifying number to each said pallet when loaded with finalized product in small containers; and

scanning the new labels on associated loaded pallets for date and time marking, updating said ledger with the scanned data and all of the codes on said small containers carried by each said pallet, and increasing the inventory of the packer for packed palletized filled product.

21. The method of Claim 20, further including the step of scanning the labels of pallets carrying filled product containers for date and time marking at the time of loading the palletized containers onto transport vehicles for shipment to wholesalers, for creating a packing list, reducing the final packers inventory of finished product, noting the wholesaler to receive the products, and updating said ledger.

22. The method of Claim 20, further including the steps of:
selecting on a random basis, filled containers of either one of source product or packed product;
sampling product from said randomly selected containers for laboratory and quality control analysis; and
scanning labels of said randomly selected containers for date and time marking, and adding comments, all for entry into said ledger for recording the analysis events.

23. The method of Claim 20, further including the step of correlating associated user databases for reporting from said ledger the tracking of said product from raw material to final packed product.

24. The method of Claim 23, wherein said correlating step further includes using P2P programming to provide the correlation.

25. A method for tracking and recording the production of food products from farms where the food products are grown, through the entire food processing chain to the consumer, said method comprising the steps of:

applying to every relatively large container a permanent label imprinted with a scannable unique code or number, said label to be applied at the time of manufacture, for uniquely identifying each container throughout their entire period of use;

scanning a label after application to a container, for date and time marking the manufacture of the container, and identifying the manufacturer;

applying to any pallet loaded with a plurality of relatively small containers, a permanent label imprinted with a scannable unique code or number, said label to be applied at the time of loading each said pallet(s), for uniquely identifying each said pallet(s) as used in association with said plurality of relatively small containers;

scanning the label on each said pallet(s), for date and time marking the loading of the pallet, identifying the relatively small containers, and their manufacturer;

applying permanent labels onto a plurality of food gathering baskets located on the premises of the food gathering organization, each label being coded for uniquely identifying each basket and the associated manufacturer; and

scanning the respective labels on said baskets when distributed to crop pickers, for recording on said ledger the name of the crop picker assigned a particular basket, along with other information printed on the label, and date and time marking.

26. The method of Claim 25, further including the step of registering data obtained in said scanning step into a central ledger for recording placement of the container into the inventory of the associated manufacturer, and maintaining a permanent record of the history of the container, including its manufacturer and use.

27. The method of Claim 26, further including the step of registering data obtained in said step of scanning each pallet label into said ledger, for date and time marking

the loading of a pallet, identifying the containers, and their manufacturer, and for recording placement of the pallets(s) with associated containers into the inventory of the associated manufacturer.

28. The method of Claim 26, further including the steps of:

scanning the labels on empty large containers to be shipped to distributors as they are loaded onto transport vehicles for date and time marking each container for updating said ledger to reduce the associated manufacturer's inventory, and to produce a packing list for the associated shipment; and

scanning the labels on empty said large containers at the time of delivery to a distributor for date and time marking them, adding them into the distributor's inventory, and updating said ledger.

29. The method of Claim 28, further including the steps of:

scanning the labels on empty said large containers at the time of loading onto a transport vehicle for shipment from the distributor to an end user packer, for date and time marking to both produce a packing list, and reduce the distributor's inventory, along with updating said ledger; and

scanning the labels on empty large containers upon delivery to an end user packer, for both registering the containers into the packer's unfinished inventory, and updating said ledger.

30. The method of Claim 26, further including the step of scanning the labels on each full crop gathering basket returned by a crop picker to a receiving station of the associated gathering organization, for date and time marking the receipt, and updating the ledger to show each such receipt, the crop picker's identification, and noting the product, farm source, and any other required data, along with removing the crop picker's name from assignment of the basket.

31. The method of Claim 30, further including the steps of:
labeling processing tanks with a permanent unique identification number or code; and
scanning the labels on each full gathering basket at the time of dumping its food
product into a receiving processing tank or container, for date and time marking the dumping,
noting the destination of the tank or container, and updating the ledger.

32. The method of Claim 31, further including the steps of:
scanning the labels for date and time marking all labeled containers at each station or
point in the process for converting raw food product into a final packaged product, and for
updating the ledger with the scanned data;
scanning labels of empty drums or containers delivered by intermediate processors to
a production line, to provide date and time marking of each drum along with the associated
production line number and product identification of product to be loaded into an associated
drum, the scanned and included data being used to reduce the intermediate packer's inventory
of packaging materials, and update the central ledger;
moving processing tanks filled with product to be processed to a production line, for
emptying product onto the production line; and
scanning labels of emptied processing tanks for time and date marking associated
product dumping events, for obtaining data to identify product delivered to the production
line, reduce the intermediate packer's inventory of filled processing tanks, marking the
products association with a particular production line, and updating said ledger.

33. The method of Claim 32, further including the steps of:
applying labels having scannable unique codes to every unlabeled container, if any,
containing ingredients to be added to product during processing, for uniquely identifying
each container; and

scanning labels of containers carrying ingredients to date and time mark each, and to indicate the amount of said respective ingredients that are to be added to product, respectively.

34. The method of Claim 33, further including the steps of:
selecting on a random basis, filled containers of either one of source product or packed product;
sampling product from said randomly selected containers for laboratory and quality control analysis; and
scanning labels of said randomly selected containers for date and time marking, and adding comments, all for entry into said ledger for recording the analysis events.

35. The method of Claim 34, further including the steps of:
scanning labels of filled containers or drums after filling to identify their source product, introduce the same into the intermediate packer's inventory, and update said ledger, for the semi-processed product;
scanning labels of containers of semi-processed product as they are loaded onto transport vehicles for creating a packing list, reducing the intermediate packer's inventory of semi-processed product, and updating said ledger;
scanning the labels of the semi-processed product drums or containers when delivered to a final packer's facility, for date and time marking, and adding the same to the final packer's inventory, and updating said ledger;
scanning the labels of any semi-processed product drums or containers randomly selected for inspection or sampling, for date and time marking, and adding to said ledger; and
scanning the labels of drums or containers of semi-processed product for date and time marking when they are delivered to a final packer, for updating said ledger along with a notation of the pack line number, and for removing the associated drums or containers from semi-processed inventory.

36. The method of Claim 35, further including the steps of:

scanning the labels of pallets carrying relatively small containers for date and time marking the pallet label when brought to the pack line, and using the scanned data to reduce an inventory of packaging materials;

removing any shrink wrap and labels from said pallets;

printing coded information on said small containers at the time of filling them with product and sealing the containers;

casing and palletizing the small containers as they exit an associated packing line;

applying a new label with unique identifying number to each said pallet when loaded with finalized product in small containers; and

scanning the new labels on associated loaded pallets for date and time marking, updating said ledger with the scanned data and all of the codes on said small containers carried by each said pallet, and increasing the inventory of the packer for packed palletized filled product.

37. The method of Claim 36, further including the step of scanning the labels of pallets carrying filled product containers for date and time marking at the time of loading the palletized containers onto transport vehicles for shipment to wholesalers, for creating a packing list, reducing the final packers inventory of finished product, noting the wholesaler to receive the products, and updating said ledger.

38. The method of Claim 37, further including the steps of:

using P2P programming to provide a computer program correlating associated databases for reporting from said ledger the tracking of said product from raw material to final packed product; and

permitting a consumer to identify a product via the code applied to the associated container, for the purpose of tracking the product's processing from a pallet received by a

wholesaler back to the final packer, the intermediate packer, the crop picker, the basket used by the crop picker, the crop picker, and the farm where the product was grown.

39. The method of Claim 37, wherein said food products are ultimately liquid or liquid suspended food products.

40. A system for tracking and recording the production of food products from farm to ultimate consumer, comprising:

- a label maker including a unique number generator, for applying a scannable unique number on each label made, for permitting a user to produce a uniquely encoded label to be placed on any basket, container, or processing vessel used for containing or holding food over the entire production chain and process for the associated food product(s), each label being further encoded when applicable with information identifying farms, crop pickers, manufacturers, food product(s), and production lines;

- a scanner for scanning each label as applied to a basket or any other container holding the associated food products, said scanner being utilized over each step involved in moving, transporting, transferring, or storing associated food products and/or associated containers or processing vessels, said scanner providing digitized signals representative of the information on each label scanned, and the date and time of scanning;

- a personal computer (PC) responsive to the scanner, for reading the digitized label information into an associated memory;

- a server computer remote for each user;

- means for permitting a user to transmit from said memory of said PC to said server computer, the digitized information from each label scanning;

- a central ledger for permanently storing the digitized label information received by said server computer; and

- means for permitting a user to access the information stored on said central ledger.

41. The system of Claim 40, wherein said transmit means includes connecting a user PC to said server computer via the Internet.

42. The system of Claim 41, wherein said user access means includes connecting a user PC to said server computer via the Internet.

43. The system of Claim 40, wherein said transmit means includes a modem connection between said PC and said server computer.

44. The system of Claim 43, wherein said user access means includes a modem connection between said PC and said server computer.